



Acute Bronchitis

Bronchitis

SURPRISING FACT:

Many people believe that bronchitis has to be treated with antibiotics. Yet almost all cases of bronchitis are caused by viruses. Antibiotics don't work against viruses.

WHAT TO DO:

- Bronchitis will usually go away on its own, though the cough may last several days or weeks.
- Rest and drink plenty of water.
- Don't smoke.
- Avoid dust or fumes.
- Use a humidifier or breathe moist air. If you have wood heat, run a humidifier day and night.
- Get chest and back massages.

CALL YOUR DOCTOR IF:

- You continue to wheeze or cough for more than 2 weeks, especially at night or when you are active.
- You cough and feel very sick, weak and have a high fever that doesn't go down.
- You cough up blood.
- You have trouble breathing when you lie down.



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Developed in collaboration with:

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Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, American Academy of Family Physicians, and Healthwise

Bronchitis is an infection of tubes in the lungs. The infection causes damage and swelling. Your body fights the infection and mucus forms in your lungs. This makes it hard to breathe. You cough up mucus and may have a wheeze or whistling sound when you breathe.

Viruses cause bronchitis. The same kinds of viruses that cause colds also cause most bronchitis. After your body fights off the virus, it takes a while for your lungs to heal. So you may have a cough for more than a week or two. You are more likely to get bronchitis if you smoke or are around factory dust and fumes, because your lungs are already weakened. If you smoke, it takes longer for your lungs to heal. Very rarely, bronchitis can be caused in other ways, such as by stomach acid getting into the lungs or by bacteria.

Antibiotics won't help most cases of bronchitis. There is no test to prove you have bronchitis. Almost all cases of bronchitis are caused by viruses. Antibiotics won't help, because they don't kill viruses. Even when the mucus you cough up is thick and yellow, antibiotics won't help you get better any faster. Taking antibiotics when they are not needed may harm you by creating stronger germs. Most cases of bronchitis will get better on their own.

Bronchitis may be confused with allergies, asthma or pneumonia. Talk with your health care provider if you have other symptoms, such as a high fever, feeling weak, trouble breathing when you lie down, and wheezing at night or when you are active.

The best ways to prevent bronchitis are to wash your hands and to stop smoking. Viruses are spread when you touch your hands to your mouth, nose and eyes. Washing your hands often with soap and warm water will help keep viruses from entering your body. You are less likely to get bronchitis in the future if you stop smoking. Also, avoid breathing dust, smoke and fumes that can damage your lungs.



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